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SUBJECT: FRENCH DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE PUTS HIGH PRIORITY ON "CULTURE"

REF A. Paris 4568

[1](#)B. Paris 5146

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. At the GoF's' annual conference on France's development priorities, Foreign Minister Douste-Blazy underlined the importance of a European identity in forming development policy and cited the support that effective policies could bring to broader anti-terror efforts. Both Douste-Blazy and Culture Minister Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres highlighted the important role of culture in French foreign and development policy. End summary.

Dousté-Blazy addresses "the troops"

[1](#)2. (SBU) In his address to the 19-20 July conference, Minister Douste-Blazy stressed the role of development assistance and cultural politics in foreign policy--declaring that culture, international assistance and diplomacy were all key elements of France's foreign policy. Douste-Blazy urged better coordination so that French international assistance activities project one coherent message. Douste-Blazy outlined three great challenges for France's international development assistance:

--Creating European identity: in the wake of the rejected EU Constitution in France, Douste-Blazy stated that all of France should actively reflect on how it projects its development assistance, i.e. alone or within the EU. Also part of this debate is how the EU interposes itself between the nation-state and globalization. The upcoming UK-hosted summit in October to analyze the future of Europe is an opportunity to ponder these questions;

--Terrorism and diversity: Following the London bombings, Douste-Blazy meditated on the effects of terrorism on French/European culture and politics. Douste-Blazy urged French citizens to remain faithful to values of tolerance and international service and to advance intercultural dialogue. Although diversity is often a target of terrorists, he said France should remain steadfast in its support of cultural diversity and humanist values;

--Ensuring that development aid strengthens security: Douste-Blazy said the fight against poverty not only demonstrated compassion but helped make the world a safer and more secure place. France has long advanced the need to increase development aid and Douste-Blazy said he was pleased that Tony Blair and the G8 had raised the profile of this issue.

[1](#)3. (SBU) As former physician and minister of Health, Douste-Blazy also highlighted health concerns in the developing world, including AIDS and epidemics of treatable diseases (for lack of generic medicine access). Douste-Blazy lauded the unilateral actions of U.S. President Bush and Brazilian President Lula in the area of pharmaceutical outreach in sub-Saharan Africa. He held up these countries as an example for France.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Douste-Blazy unfavorably contrasted European efforts in research and development and technology with those of the U.S. Following a recent visit to the United States, Douste-Blazy said he was amazed by U.S. spending of USD 100 billion on nanotechnology and biotechnology "at a moment where Europe is incapable of an integrated research policy". In the face of job relocation and other globalization worries, Douste-Blazy hailed the U.S. focus on "green power" and technologies of the future as solid economic investments.

DOUSTE-BLAZY ON GLOBAL CHALLENGES

15. (SBU) Douste-Blazy took the opportunity to outline three major priorities of French foreign policy dealing with global challenges:

- Increasing development aid to combat economic inequalities;

- Leading a "dialogue between civilizations" to promote cultural diversity and respect for universal principles in an era of cultural cleavages;

- Improving the capacity of France to produce and diffuse knowledge.

16. (U) Douste-Blazy also cited statistics regarding the U.S. audiovisual industry influence and its consequences for French cultural influence: Hollywood studios, he said, produce eighty-five percent of films shown across the world and nine of the ten most-translated authors in the world are Anglophones. This domination of audiovisual and even printed media by Anglophones is an economic as well as cultural concern for France. In a society plagued by high unemployment, Douste-Blazy noted that the cultural sector provides 439,000 jobs in France and 2.5 percent of European employment. He singled out tourism as a golden opportunity for French cultural diplomacy, as France is the number-one tourist destination in the world.

ATTRACTING MORE STUDENTS TO FRANCE

17. (SBU) Another main goal of French foreign policy is to strengthen the position of France in higher education. Douste-Blazy said he would like to see France become the leading foreign student destination. He expressed a strong desire for France to welcome upper-level students in the domains of science, management, finance and other technical fields. Douste-Blazy said the ramifications of French success in attracting foreign students and researchers were not only the improvement of the image of the country internationally, but the success of its economic development.

CULTURAL POLICY: IDENTITY, EUROPE AND EMPLOYMENT

18. (SBU) French Minister of Culture and Communication Donnedieu de Vabres reflected on the importance of cultural diplomacy in an era of globalization: France must remain open to the world without renouncing its unique identity and culture. Donnedieu de Vabres spoke of the threat of standardization, contrasting it with the French desire to see cultural identities maintained in a framework of pluralism and mutual respect. Donnedieu de Vabres said France's cultural diplomacy is currently a key component of the government's political strategy designed to respond to France's and Europe's current identity crisis.

19. (SBU) Other GOF officials, including minister-delegate of European Affairs Catherine Colonna (former Chirac press spokesperson) also proclaimed that cultural diversity was a priority for French foreign policy. Brigitte Girardin, minister-delegate for aid, development and francophone communities, cited the promotion of French language and culture as one of her major priorities. France's notion of cultural diversity includes both exportation of French culture and encouraging the use of the French language abroad as well as the encouragement of multiculturalism.

110. (SBU) GOF officials at the conference also cited the UNESCO convention on cultural diversity, a key component of French cultural diversity efforts. France has been the driving force behind this proposed convention, which will recognize its long-sought goal of a "cultural exception", i.e., the uniqueness of cultural goods and the right of each nation to define its own cultural politics. Donnedieu de Vabres, Douste-Blazy and other GOF officials stated that the GOF is strongly campaigning for the adoption of this cultural diversity convention by this fall. The passage of the UNESCO convention would mark the codification of cultural diversity into international law.

111. (SBU) Donnedieu de Vabres proposed three initiatives for a European cultural policy:

- The establishment of a permanent Parliament of Culture, modeled after the European Cultural Ministers' meeting held May 2-3, 2005 in Paris (REF A);

- The creation of a European Culture Charter: To date, nineteen European culture ministers have adopted the declaration formulated at the May 2005 Paris meeting of European culture ministers. France is advocating the adoption of a legally binding document that resembles the pending UNESCO charter on cultural diversity;

-- The advancement of European cultural programs that could include the designation of new European heritage sites and the financing of subtitling of films to promote "European" creations. Minister-delegate Colonna highlighted an ongoing French project to create a European digital library to compete with a digital library project spearheaded recently by Google, the Internet search engine.

Comment

12. (SBU) The UNESCO debate on the Convention for Cultural Diversity is not the only arena in which France is seeking to strengthen its position on cultural issues. The GOF appears to be strengthening its efforts to use culture as a means to leverage France's influence in the world, particular among recipients of development assistance. Emphasizing an alleged "solidarity" with developing countries, France uses the "soft power" of the cultural diversity issue and its education programs to boost its authority on the world stage.

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